

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks at a Lunar New Year Celebration

January 26, 2023

The President. Elaine, thank you for that introduction. And it's wonderful to see so many friends on this special holiday, even as we gather with such heavy hearts.

Our prayers are with the people of Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay, and after yet another spree of gun violence in America.

I'm going to use this.

[At this point, the President picked up a handheld microphone.]

This working? Hello, hello, hello. Can you hear me with this?

Audience members. Yes.

The President. All right.

You know, I've been in close contact with Governor Newsom and—to provide the full support of the Federal Government. And Kamala, who has deep ties in the area, is just getting back from spending some time there with families.

And I spoke with Brandon Tsay, a general—a genuine hero. This a 26-year-old kid—26-year-old kid whose family has owned the dance studio for some time, as people were ending the celebration that night on—for the new—the Lunar New Year.

And as we all saw in the video, he heard the front door close and saw a man pointing a gun at him. Instead of running—Brandon said he thought he was going to die, but then he thought about the people inside. Think about this now. Just think about this in reality. And in that moment, he followed his instinct. And he followed his courage.

And this is a kid who went out—"a kid," he's a young man—and had the courage to act. And he did. He charged the gunman, wrestled him to the ground, and took away his semiautomatic pistol from him. He had just shot and killed 11 people and wounded several more in another dance studio nearby.

You know, it was a struggle that Brandon prevailed. But think about what could have happened had he not done this. I really mean it. You know, I think sometimes we underestimate incredible acts of courage. Someone shooting has a semiautomatic pistol aimed at you, and you think about others. That's pretty profound. Pretty profound.

You know, and in both Monterey Bay [Park; White House correction] and Half Moon Bay, we saw the heroism of police officers, firefighters, and first responders. They answered the call. They answered the call. They rushed into danger, and they saved lives and protected their neighbors.

These are tight-knit communities, as you all know. They will be affected by what they saw and what they lost for the rest of their lives. We've got to think about the impacts of posttraumatic stress on many of these folks. And as a nation, we have to be there with them. We have to be there with them. We don't have a choice.

You know, I know several Members of Congress wanted to attend here tonight because they wanted to be able to—but they have votes up on the Hill, including my dear friend, Judy Chu. Judy is chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and a former mayor of

Monterey Bay [Park]. I spoke with Judy several days ago and said: "Judy, what should I do? Should I continue to—should I be in California or should I still have this celebration?" And she felt very strongly. She said, "We have to move forward."

Her message was: Don't give into fear and sorrow. Don't do that. Stand in solidarity and in the spirit of toughness that this holiday is all about.

She went on to say that's what folks are doing back in California and across the country: providing counseling support, transition [translation; White House correction] services for the victims' families; holding candlelight vigils and bringing people together; and showing that even with heavy hearts, we have unbreakable spirits. So that's what we're going to do tonight: to be there for each other.

And by the way, you know, I said—as some of my senior staff here knows—that I was going to have the most diverse staff in American history and it was going to reflect what the population of America looked like.

Well, I knew we had more women than men. [*Laughter*] Oh! But I looked up the following. You know what percentage of AANI—of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders it is in this administration? 13.7 percent. The next highest was 7 percent. That's why the hell I'm doing so well right now. [*Laughter*]

No, but all kidding aside—most of all, when you think about the loved ones who were left behind, they were grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, friends, neighbors, but they were fellow Americans.

So please join me in a moment of silence to honor them.

[*A moment of silence was observed.*]

May God bless them all.

You know, I'm really honored to be with you all tonight. For centuries, families in Asia and the United States and all around the world have gathered to celebrate the first Moon of the new year. It's a time of renewal and reflection, hope and possibilities: for good over evil, for sharing meals, for celebrating firecrack—no firecrackers tonight. [*Laughter*]

Fire—no, I'm serious. I was thinking about that, you know. [*Laughter*] If things hadn't been like they'd been the last couple years, we should have fireworks outside.

But you know, celebrating with firecrackers and dance. We've got dance. [*Laughter*] Honoring your ancestors while passing down traditions to the next generation. All of you here and across the country have opened your hearts and homes to friends and neighbors to wish each other a prosperous new year full of good health and good fortune.

So to start the new tradition in the Nation for holidays that—where home is central, Jill and I are honored to welcome you to the first Lunar New Year reception of this scale held in the White House—your home. This is your home.

Audience member. Thank you!

The President. No, this is the people's house. For real. Jill and I are very temporary residents in this home. [*Laughter*]

But all kidding aside—

Audience member. Not too temporary.

The President. Well, God—[*laughter*].

Audience member. Four more.

The President. God love you.

Look, you know, for many of you, this is the Year of the Rabbit. And for others, like the Vietnamese community, it's the Year of the Cat.

And the rabbit: earnest and persistent in the face of great challenges. The cat: majestic, beloved, a protector. By the way, that sounds like our cat Willow, who maybe—[*laughter*]*—*you think I'm kidding. Willow may walk in here any time now. She has no limits. And—[*laughter*]*—*oh, you think I'm kidding? I'm not. Especially in the middle of the night when she climbs up and lays on top of my head. [*Laughter*]

Look, all of you reflect the values represented by these symbols. And I mean that sincerely. And the Lunar New Year offers an opportunity to acknowledge the many ways you've enriched this country through diversity of culture, the breadth of achievements, including a record number of Oscar nominations that were announced just this week and that are long overdue.

I know nothing about entertainment. [*Laughter*] But I know when people are picked that is best.

And speaking of winning, we're honored to be joined by Olympic champion—gold and silver and bronze medalist—a three-time world champion figure skater, Nathan Chen. Nathan, where are you? Nathan, good to see you, pal. Come here. Get up here.

You're the only guy that can step—good to see you, Nathan. Thank you.

Team U.S.A. figure skater Nathan Chen. Thank you so much.

The President. That's not bad. Gold medal, bronze—holy mackerel. [*Laughter*]

It also includes the great work led by those in my administration. I heard we have an Ambassador who's a daughter of immigrants, and she happens to be—I think her name is Katherine Tai. [*Laughter*] I'm not sure. Thank you. You're doing a hell of a job for us. You really are.

By the way, she's gained the respect of folks around the world. Not a joke. Not a joke. She's the best. The first—the first Asian American woman of color to serve as U.S. Trade Representative. And just last week, she helped launched the first-ever National Strategy To Advance Equity, Justice, and Opportunity for Asian Americans. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

I get other world leaders saying: "You don't explain this very well. Send her back, will you?" Really, you're doing a hell of a job, kid. Thank you, thank you.

And together with Congress, we passed historic legislation to bring us one step closer to preserving and amplifying the contributions and history of the community through a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture.

Yet, for all the progress, this community has experienced profound hate, pain, and violence and loss with the rise of anti-hate crime—Asian anti-hate [anti-Asian hate; White House correction] crimes. You know, gut-wrenching attacks on elderly immigrant women.

As I've said many times before, hate can have no safe haven or harbor in America. No person deserves to be treated with hate—in a hateful way. They all deserve to be treated with dignity and with respect.

That's why I'm proud—with the help of many of you in this room, we signed into law a COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, and the host—and to host the first-ever White House Summit Against Hate-Fueled Violence.

Look, folks, it's real simple: Silence is complicity. Silence is complicity. We cannot be silent. I will not be silent.

And one more thing: We're going to ban assault weapons again in a Biden—[inaudible]. I did it once as a Senator. We're going to do it again.

And let me close with this. The Lunar New Year ends with the hanging of those red lanterns to symbolize letting go of the past and committing to new beginnings.

Well, I'm—I mean this sincerely; you've heard me say it many times: I've never been more optimistic in my life about the future of this country and the ability to unify this country. I really mean it.

As we gather here today, let's recommit to the work of standing together and taking care of one another. Let's do the work of spreading hope, joy, and love.

So, from the Biden family to yours, we wish you a happy, healthy, prosperous New Year. And please enjoy the reception and the wonderful program that's about to begin.

I guess I've got to step down here. I'll give you that. Okay.

[The President handed the microphone to an aide. He then joined the First Lady in the audience to watch a performance by the Choy Wun Lion Dance Troupe. Following the performance, the First Lady spoke as follows.]

The First Lady. No, I've got it. Thank you. Yes——

The President. You going to dance?

The First Lady. No, you're going to come up with—[laughter] No, but I would love that costume. [Laughter]

[The First Lady returned to the stage, followed by the President.]

The First Lady. Come on up, Joe. [Laughter]

The President. I'm not dancing. I don't dance. [Laughter]

The First Lady. No, you're not going to dance, believe me. [Laughter] We don't want to ruin the evening.

You know, it was so funny, I saw that tangerine there when I was speaking, and I thought—I thought, "Oh, one of the workers left that." Thank God I—[laughter]—thank God I didn't pick it up.

But anyway, weren't they amazing? Can we give them another—[applause]?

[Laughter] So please join us for a reception. And welcome to the White House. Happy New Year.

The President. And by the way, I only have one regret. I wish my grandkids were here. [Laughter] Thank you.

The First Lady. Thank you.

The President. All right.

The First Lady. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 5:45 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Elaine Tso, chief executive officer, Asian Services in Action; Gov. Gavin C. Newsom of California; Vice President Kamala D. Harris; and Huu Can Tran, suspected gunman in the shooting at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio in Monterey Park, CA, on January 21. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the opening remarks of the First Lady and Ms. Tso.

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